



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Gregory G. Lockhart
Southern District of Ohio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2007
<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ohs>

CONTACT: Vipal J. Patel
937-225-2910

FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS DAYTON MAN OF DRUG CONSPIRACY, DRUG TRAFFICKING, AND FIREARMS CRIMES

***Facing Mandatory Life Sentence Without Release Due to Two or More Prior Felony Drug
Convictions and Federal "Three Felony Drug Strikes" Law***

DAYTON - A United States District Court jury convicted Mark J. Thornton, age 32, of Dayton, of drug conspiracy and trafficking, as well as a related firearms crime, arising out of his and a co-conspirator's activities in purchasing multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from Mexican suppliers, re-packaging the cocaine into smaller quantities and converting some cocaine into crack cocaine, and then re-selling the narcotics to other street-level drug dealers and users in the Dayton area.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, Eric Spradling, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Wanda Smith, Acting Chief, Dayton Police Department, announced the verdict returned late Wednesday, at the conclusion of a trial that began October 3 before Senior United States District Judge Walter H. Rice.

The jury convicted Thornton of one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 5 kilograms of cocaine and more than 50 grams of crack cocaine, one count of possession with intent to distribute more than 500 grams of cocaine, and one count of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime. The jury acquitted Thornton of one count of possession with intent to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine.

Testimony presented at trial revealed that, after supplying smaller quantities of cocaine to his long-time friend, Nirvana Martin, Thornton started pooling his money with Martin in mid-2005, in an effort to purchase kilogram quantities of cocaine for purposes of re-sale. From at least August 2005 until October 12, 2005, the day of a Dayton police raid, the two purchased at least a kilogram of cocaine each day from Mexican suppliers operating in the Dayton area. The cocaine would typically cost the pair approximately \$20,000 per kilogram. Taking the kilograms of cocaine to various "spots" or drug houses in the Dayton area, Thornton and Martin would re-package the cocaine into smaller quantities for "around the clock" re-sale to other drug dealers and users. Cocaine would also be converted into crack cocaine for re-sale. The evidence further indicated that on October 12, 2005, after obtaining a search warrant, Dayton police detectives and officers raided one of these drug houses, located at 2316 Eastview Avenue, where they encountered both Thornton and Martin, among others. During the execution of the search warrant, officers recovered over \$5,000 from the pockets of Martin and over \$3400 and four cell phones from the pockets of Thornton, as well as numerous weapons, nearly a kilogram of cocaine in various packages, over 50 grams of crack cocaine, digital scales, and drug packaging material, including numerous discarded kilogram-size cocaine wrappers -- one with a "Lacoste alligator" label -- containing cocaine powder residue.

Thornton was charged with these counts in a multi-count indictment filed December 14, 2005, and was arrested on the charges on February 13, 2006. Thornton is further charged with having two or more prior felony drug convictions (namely, three felony-level prior drug convictions in state court). If two or more of these prior convictions are confirmed by the Court, Thornton faces a mandatory life sentence without the possibility of release on the conspiracy conviction, a concurrent 10 years to life sentence for the cocaine possession with intent to distribute conviction, and a mandatory consecutive 5 years to life for the firearm conviction. Judge Rice set Thornton's sentencing for January 22, 2008 at 9:00 a.m.

"These men were responsible for poisoning many Dayton houses and streets with cocaine," Lockhart said. "The combination of guns and drugs in particular contribute greatly to the level of violent crimes on our streets, especially when the drugs are being distributed by repeat, armed drug offenders. By federal and local agencies working cooperatively, we can make our community safer."

United States Attorney Lockhart commended the efforts of the DEA Task Force officers and Dayton Police detectives for their investigation of the case, as well as Assistant United States Attorney and Deputy Criminal Chief Vipal J. Patel and Assistant United States Attorney Brent G. Tabacchi, who prosecuted the case in court.

#